

**Remarks on the Resignation of Charles T. Hagel as Secretary of Defense**  
*November 24, 2014*

*The President.* About a year ago, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel was visiting our troops in the Republic of Korea thanking them for their service and answering their questions, and they asked about the usual topics, about our national security, the future of our military. And then one soldier, a sergeant from Ohio asked him, what was the most pertinent question of the day, which was, what was your favorite college football team? To which Chuck replied, "Born and raised in Nebraska, I don't have a choice, I am a strong Cornhuskers fan."

Now there was a time when an enlisted soldier might have been reluctant to ask that kind of question of the Secretary of Defense. But Chuck Hagel has been no ordinary Secretary of Defense. As the first enlisted combat veteran to serve in that position, he understands our men and women like few others, because he's stood where they stood, he's been in the dirt, and he's been in the mud, and that's established a special bond. He sees himself in them, and they see themselves in him. And their safety, their lives, have always been at the center of Chuck's service.

When I asked Chuck to serve as Secretary of Defense, we were entering a significant period of transition: the drawdown in Afghanistan, the need to prepare our forces for future missions, and tough fiscal choices to keep our military strong and ready. Over nearly 2 years, Chuck has been an exemplary Defense Secretary, providing a steady hand as we modernized our strategy and budget to meet long-term threats, while still responding to immediate challenges like ISIL and Ebola. Thanks to Chuck, our military is on a firmer footing, engaged in these missions and looking ahead to the future.

Now last month, Chuck came to me to discuss the final quarter of my Presidency and determined that having guided the Department through this transition, it was an appropriate time for him to complete his service. Let me just say that Chuck is and has been a great friend of mine. I've known him, admired him, and trusted him for nearly a decade since I was a green-behind-the-ears freshman Senator and we were both on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. If there's one thing I know about Chuck, it's that he does not make this or any decision lightly. This decision does not come easily to him, but I consider myself extraordinarily lucky to have had him by my side for 2 years, and I am grateful that Chuck has agreed to stay on until I nominate a successor and that successor is confirmed by the Senate, which means that he'll continue to guide our troops at this challenging time.

I'll have more opportunity to pay tribute to Chuck's life of service in the days ahead. For now, let me just say this: Chuck Hagel has devoted himself to our national security and our men and women in uniform across more than six decades. He volunteered for Vietnam and still carries the scars and shrapnel from the battles that he fought. At the VA, he fought to give our veterans, especially his fellow Vietnam veterans, the benefits they had earned. As head of the USO, he made sure America always honors our troops. As a Senator, he helped lead the fight for the post-9/11 GI bill, which is helping so many of our newest veterans and their families realize their dreams of a college education. As Secretary, Chuck has helped transition our military and bolstered America's leadership around the world. During his tenure, Afghan forces took the lead for security in Afghanistan. Our forces have drawn down. Our combat

mission there ends next month, and we'll partner with Afghans to preserve the gains we have made.

The NATO alliance is as strong as it has ever been, and we have reassured our allies with our increased presence in Central and Eastern Europe. We've modernized our alliances in the Asia-Pacific, updated our defense posture, and recently agreed to improve communications between the U.S. and Chinese militaries. Chuck has been critical to all these accomplishments.

Meanwhile, Chuck has ensured that our military is ready for new missions. Today, our men and women in uniform are taking the fight against ISIL in Iraq, in Syria, and Chuck helped build the international coalition to ensure that the world is meeting this threat together. Today our forces are helping support the civilian effort against Ebola in West Africa, a reminder, as Chuck likes to say, that America's military is the greatest force for good in the world.

Finally, in a very difficult budgetary environment, Chuck has never lost sight of key priorities: the readiness of our force and the quality of our life of our troops and their families. He's launched new reforms to ensure that even as our military is leaner, it remains the strongest in the world, and so our troops can continue to get the pay, the housing, the healthcare, the childcare that they and their families need, reforms that we need Congress to now support. At the same time, after the tragedies that we've seen, Chuck has helped lead the effort to improve security at our military installations and to stamp out the scourge of sexual assault from the ranks.

And, Chuck, I also want to thank you on a personal level. We come from different parties, but in accepting this position, you send a powerful message—especially to folks in this city—that when it comes to our national security and caring for our troops and their families, we are all Americans first. When I nominated you for this position, you said that you'd always give me your honest advice and informed counsel. You have. When it's mattered most—behind closed doors, in the Oval Office—you've always given it to me straight. And for that, I will always be grateful.

I recall when I was a nominee in 2008, and I traveled to Afghanistan and Iraq. Chuck Hagel accompanied me on that trip along with Jack Reed. And it's pretty rare, at a time when sometimes this town is so politicized, to have a friend who was willing to accompany a nominee from another party because he understood that, whoever ended up being President, what was most important was that we were unified when we confronted the challenges that we see overseas. And that's the kind of class and integrity that Chuck Hagel has always represented.

Now, Chuck, you've said that a life is only as good as the family you have and the friends you surround yourself with. And in that, you are blessed. I want to thank Lilibet, your son Ziller, and your daughter Allyn for the sacrifices that they've made as well.

*Secretary Hagel.* Thank you.

*The President.* I know that as reluctant as we are to see you go, they are equally excited to getting their husband and father back. And I'm sure the Cornhuskers are also happy that a fan will be there to cheer them on more often.

Today, the United States of America can proudly claim the strongest military the world has ever known. That's the result of the investments made over many decades, the blood and treasure and sacrifices of generations. It's the result of the character and wisdom of those who

lead them as well, including a young Army sergeant in Vietnam who rose to serve as our Nation's 24th Secretary of Defense. So on behalf of a grateful nation, thank you Chuck.

*Secretary Hagel.* Thank you very much.

Mr. President, thank you. Thank you for your generous words, for your friendship, for your support, which I have always valued and will continue to value. And to my not old, but my longtime, dear friend Vice President Biden, who I have always admired and respected, and both the President and I have learned an awful lot from the Vice President over the years. Thank you.

And I want to thank the Deputy Secretary of Defense who is here, Bob Work, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Marty Dempsey, who also is here. I want to thank them for being here this morning. I also want to thank you both for your tremendous leadership of the Defense Department and what you mean to our men and women and their families all over the world and for the honor I've had to serve with each of you and the privilege it's been in every way.

And I want to thank the entire leadership team at the Pentagon. Without their support and wise counsel over the last couple of years, our many accomplishments, and the President noted some, I have been part of that, but it's a team. It's all these tremendous men and women, as you know, Mr. President, that make this happen, and I couldn't be prouder of them and what we have accomplished over the almost 2 years that I've had the honor of serving in this position.

And as the President noted, I have today submitted my resignation as Secretary of Defense. It's been the greatest privilege of my life; the greatest privilege of my life to lead and, most important, to serve: to serve with the men and women of the Defense Department and support their families. I am immensely proud of what we've accomplished during this time. We have prepared ourselves—as the President has noted—our allies, and Afghan National Security Forces for successful transition in Afghanistan. We've bolstered enduring alliances and strengthened emerging partnerships while successfully responding to crises around the world.

And we've launched important reforms that the President noted, reforms that will prepare this institution for the challenges facing us in decades to come. I believe we have set not only this Department—the Department of Defense—but the Nation on a stronger course toward security, stability, and prosperity. If I didn't believe that, I would not have done this job.

As our country prepares to celebrate Thanksgiving, I want to—you, Mr. President, and you, Vice President Biden—acknowledge what you have done and how grateful I am to both of you for your leadership and your friendship and for giving me this opportunity to serve our country once again.

I will continue to support you, Mr. President, and the men and women who defend this country every day so unselfishly and their families, what they do for our country so unselfishly. And as I have said, and as the President noted, I will stay on this job and work just as hard as I have over the last couple of years, every day, every moment, until my successor is confirmed by the United States Senate.

I'd also like to express my gratitude to our colleagues on Capitol Hill, my gratitude to them for their support of me, but more importantly, their support of our troops, and their families and their continued commitment to our national security.

I also want to thank my international counterparts for their friendship and their partnership and their advice during my time as Secretary of Defense. Their involvement with me and their partnership with me, in so many of these important areas as we build these coalitions of common interests, as you have noted, Mr. President, are so critically important. And to them, I am grateful, I will be forever grateful.

And finally, I'd like to thank my family. My wife Lilibet, who you have mentioned, Mr. President, who was with me this morning as she has been with me throughout so many years and during so many tremendous experiences. And this experience and opportunity and privilege to serve as Secretary of Defense has been one of those; and to my daughter Allyn and my son Ziller.

Mr. President, again, thank you. To you and to all of our team everywhere, and as we know Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, it is a team effort. And that's part of the fun of it, to help build teams and to work together to make things happen for the good of the country and make a better world. For all of that, I am immensely grateful. And to all of you, your families, happy Thanksgiving. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

*Categories:* Resignations and Retirements : Defense Secretary, resignation, remarks.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Hagel, Allyn; Hagel, C. Ziller; Hagel, Charles T.; Hagel, Lilibet Z.; Reed, John F.

*Subjects:* Afghanistan : Afghan military and security forces; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Africa : West Africa, Ebola epidemic, response and containment efforts; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Sexual assault; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Wages and benefits; Asia : Relations with U.S.; China : Relations with U.S.; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Senate :: Presidential nominations, confirmation process; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Iraq : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Veterans : Service and dedication.

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